

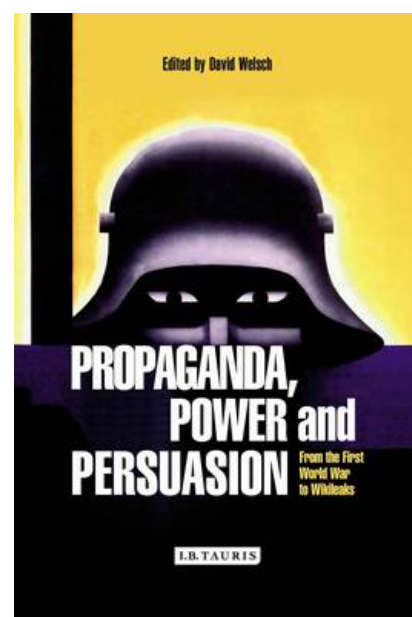
# Book Review: Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War One to Wikileaks by David Welch

**LSE** [blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2014/02/24/book-review-propaganda-power-and-persuasion-from-world-war-one-to-wikileaks-by-david-welch/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2014/02/24/book-review-propaganda-power-and-persuasion-from-world-war-one-to-wikileaks-by-david-welch/)

*In this book, the contributors set out to trace the development of techniques of opinion management from the First World War to the current conflict in Afghanistan. **Michael Warren** finds that this book makes valuable contributions to a rich body of literature critiquing how leaders, media and other entities shape public opinion, whilst being accessible and thought-provoking to readers new to the subject.*

**Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War I to Wikileaks . David Welch. I.B.Tauris. October 2013.**

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“Whom should I trust?” is the question on the mind of the reader who has just completed *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War One to Wikileaks*. Media, governments and military forces are all scrutinised in this diverse collection of fourteen articles edited by [David Welch](#). Welch was co-curator of the recent [Propaganda: Power and Persuasion exhibit at the British Library](#) and has assembled experts from an array of fields (ranging from History to Communication Studies) to create *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War One to Wikileaks*. The chronological and geographical scope of the collection is large: covering in detail well-known topics like Nazi propaganda to more niche subjects such as Radio Free Asia and the final ten years of the USA Information Agency’s existence. Such vast different chapters are bound together by a common thread of studying the link between war and propaganda.

The collection begins with Mark Connelly’s piece on the British Navy’s 1914 victory over the German Navy in the Battle of Falklands Islands in ‘Propaganda, Memory and Identity: The Battle of the Falkland Islands, December 1914’. Connelly illustrates how the battle was recast to suit the propaganda needs of different eras. During the First World War, the battle was viewed as a morale-boosting victory and affirmation of British naval superiority; amid the thaw of the 1920’s Anglo-German relations a respectful projection of German combatants at the battle was shown but by the 1930’s (during the rise of Nazism) the clash was viewed as British forces making a stand against great tyranny.

Connelly astutely notes the battle became an enduring icon of British Imperial success: the furthest reaches of the Empire had not only been protected by the motherland, but had been subjected to the same turmoil and the battle was used as a moment to bind imperial relations. The encounter served a ‘propagandist narrative of increasing Falklander identity and self worth’ which was perpetuated in stamps, postcards films and other media. The battle’s importance became profound again in the 1970’s when it seemed possible sovereignty of the islands might be transferred to Argentina: in response, images of the 1914 battle were invoked, and the islanders’ loyalty was recounted. Once again the battle’s symbolism had been altered and it became representative of proud colonial subjects fighting for their way of life.

Connelly picks up on a critical theme shared by many of the other articles in the collection: propaganda by itself is not simply a persuasive tool, it must build upon a pre-existing opinion. Welch recalls in the book’s introduction Aldous Huxley’s pithy analysis: “The propagandist is a man who canalises an already existing stream”. Thus, the propagandist must entrench

existing perceptions to his or her benefit, as displayed below in the First World War recruitment poster playing on a combination of British fears of the German advance and British men's roles as masculine protectors of their women and children.



Credit: Keijo Knutas. CC BY 2.0

Following the book from beginning to end, the reader learns of propaganda's evolution from the simplistic rallying calls of wartime posters to the more nuanced methods of opinion management in a digital era. For example, Gary D. Rawnsley's piece on Radio Free Asia (RFA) explores the method of not simply spoon feeding an audience a persuasive message but actively involving its audience in the production of the propagandist's message: Chinese callers are encouraged to phone the Government funded RFA radio station with first-hand insights into a news story and thus create participatory rather than passive message to its audience.

The increasing complexity of propaganda output is evident in Stephen Badsey's eye-opening article on American attempts to win Fallujah from insurgents in the Second Gulf War. Badsey observes how the line between information operations (using information to successfully execute military operations) and public affairs (information given to the media and public) is blurred, or 'Bridging the Firewall' as the chapter is named. The crossover is so great, that the media are even treated as combatants. Initial American failure to win the city of Fallujah in 2004 was blamed on poor representation in the media (especially Al Jazeera) as US forces believed they were being unfairly portrayed as committing atrocities. Horrifying reports were beamed across the world by international media – sometimes as graphic as images of dead babies 'bespattered with blood' and their mothers in Fallujah General Hospital. Badsey contextualises US military thinking well, describing the long-running suspicion of media engrained in the American military – only 8% of US officers who had fought in the Vietnam War thought the media had been 'generally responsible' in a 1976 survey. Thus, Badsey shows how American commanders begrudgingly learnt the lessons of handling the global media in Iraq. The lessons came to fruition later in the year when American forces implemented new rules of how to engage in combat (for example, US troops were ordered to record with mobile devices evidence of mosques and schools were being used by insurgents and better utilisation of journalists embedded into US ranks), which led to the eventual capture of Fallujah.

The collection is enjoyable, fascinating and broad but perhaps let down by the glaring omission of articles primarily focused on the Cold War. Although the subject is considered in the "Cold War and Post-Cold War" section, none of the three pieces the section place the Cold War as a sole focus of their studies. This is a shame as the Cold War was a global conflict between two opposing ideological and economic entities it is surely a fertile area for the study of propaganda, power and persuasion. The collection could also do with a more thorough examination of the cult of personality and less of a Western focus. That said, the collection's authors make concise but valuable contributions to a rich body of literature (Noam Chomsk and Edward Herman's [Manufacturing of Consent](#), Philip Taylor's [Munitions of the Mind](#) and John Mearsheimer's [Why Leaders Lie](#) to name a few) critiquing how leaders, media and other entities shape public opinion, whilst being accessible

and thought-provoking to readers who might have little knowledge of the subjects discussed within the book.

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**Michael Warren** completed an MSc in Empires, Colonialism and Globalisation at the LSE in 2012, having graduated from the University of Sheffield (studying on exchange at the University of Waterloo, Ontario) with a BA in Modern History in 2011. He has researched as part of an open data project for Deloitte and the Open Data Institute, and worked for the All-Party Parliamentary Health Group. He is an Analyst at Accenture. [Read more reviews by Michael](#).